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The Illegal Proliferation of Narcotics in Russia: Internal Trends and the Impact on the International Situation

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More than 30 years ago, in his book *Our Criminal Society*, the American scholar Edwin Schur expressed an opinion that belongs on the list of timeless criminological aphorisms: "...the crimes that are characteristic of a given society represent the price the society pays for its wish to build a social structure of one type or another."¹ One crime-scale indicator that reflects the status of society is narcotics crime, which today directly concerns Russia.

According to my estimates, at least 2.7 million narcotics crimes [per year] are being committed in Russia, and at least 3,000 tons of narcotic materials are in illegal circulation. The number of active narcotics users in Russia, based on my estimates, grew from 1.5 million in 1990 to 2.2 million in 1995.

The aforementioned figures confirm only that part of Mr. Schur's aphorism which records a society's crime potential while the society is in a period of transition, i.e., when a nation is in transition from one socio-economic form to another, or from one type of civilization to another.

Let us recall the narcotics situation which developed in Russia in the 1920s, when the country was experiencing the consequences of the revolutionary transformation from the monarchy epoch to the epoch of Soviet power. At that time, according to expert estimates, in one army of seven million street urchins there were various groups of children whose drug usage ranged from 40% to 100%. However, shortly before the outbreak of World War II the narcotics situation in Russia had stabilized, a fact which is confirmed by empirical data.

In Moscow alone, the number of drug addicts in 1926 was .37 per 10,000 people, and 15 years later, in 1940, the number had declined to .09, i.e., by 41 times.

Under the appropriate conditions we believe that organizing resistance to a Third Wave of drug addiction and illegal drug trafficking in Russia (the second wave came in the late 1950s to early

1960s²) would reduce tension. At the same time, it is difficult to come up with any precise short-term predictions about the illegal proliferation of narcotics (IPN), because the characteristics of the development of world civilization at the end of the 20th century are so strikingly different from those that existed at the beginning of the century. Thus, for example, in the 1920s and subsequent years there existed an "iron curtain" in the Soviet Union, and the nation was "stewing" in its own juices during the period when the narcotics problem was worsening. Today, since the borders are transparent, Russia is in a position both to bring in from the outside the experience of trans-national organized crime and also to expand drug production outward into the world community, chiefly to Europe.

In order to understand the new role which Russia can play, either in increasing or reducing the international proliferation of drugs, it is essential to analyze the key trends which are contributing to the growing drug problem inside the country. Next, one can suggest a model for an effective international strategy which could stabilize the IPN to a level acceptable for normal life in Russian society, as well as in the surrounding states as equal members of a single world community.

In this regard we would suggest a brief examination of a few general IPN trends in Russia, specifically:

- a. the historical background of IPN;
- b. the ongoing marginalization of society;
- c. an increasing liberalization of anti-drug laws;
- d. the increase in ethnic narco-crime;
- e. corruption in the INP sphere, and;
- f. narcotics smuggling.

Historical Background of IPN

The historical sources of IPN are important, but they are neither exclusive nor inherent. The phenomenon of using and selling narcotics has been known in all historical civilizations. In the pre-Christian epoch, drug use in Russia was strictly controlled by pagan priests, later by the church, then by medicine, then by the police and the church together, right up until the beginning of the Soviet era, when this practice became the prerogative of the state alone, which continues to be the case today.

Drug trafficking, in its organized and trans-national form, has existed in Russia since the colonization of the Caucasus, the Trans-Caucasus and Central Asia. As I.S. Levitov, a Russian expert writing at the beginning of the 20th century, observed: "In the rapid spread of narcotics here I see only the symptoms of the coming influence of Asia on Europe. Russia, standing as she does as a forward post between Asia and Europe, and serving as a sort of buffer for all the remaining European peoples, will be the first to feel the Asian pressure, as we are now seeing in the already rapid spread here of narcotics."

Thus, the historical roots of IPN in Russia are those of civilization in general, modified by regional particularities.

Marginalization of Russian Society

The contemporary marginalization of Russian society affects IPN development both directly and indirectly. This marginalization is the result of social processes which were themselves a natural product of the extremely sudden transition from a centralized, state economy and the totalitarian-based daily life of Soviet society to free-market relations and a democratic way of life.

So far,
the
result
of this
longer-
term

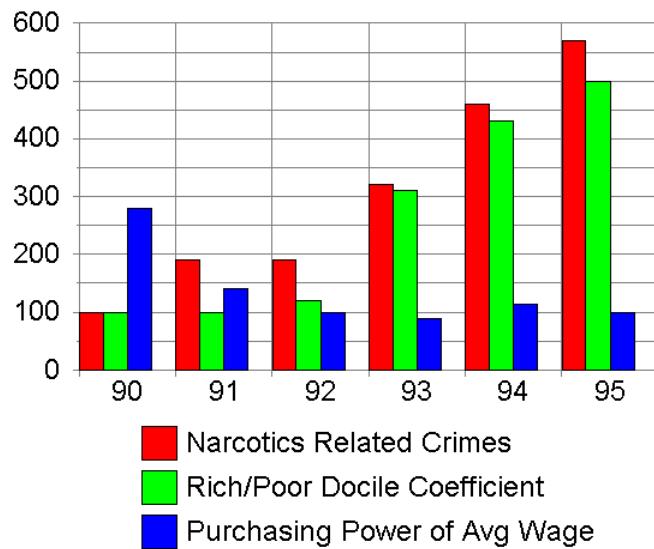


Figure 1 - Growth Rates of the Two Economic Indicators and of Narcotics-related Crime, 1990-95 (%).

positive and extremely complicated process has been that the price of bread has increased by 15,000 times in the last five years, and the price of medicine by 11,000 times. Clothing prices have risen by 7-10,000 times, as opposed to the average wage, which has risen five times slower than the price of food and manufactured goods. At the same time, the average price of a pack of cigarettes has increased by 5,000 times, a bottle of vodka by 1,250 times and a kilogram of marijuana by 1,110 times.

In other words, market conditions are developing in such away as to favor the population's use of narcotics, alcohol and tobacco over manufactured goods and food items, which stimulates expansion of the sphere of narcotics users.

There are economic prerequisites for increasing the growth rate of narcotics trafficking. Thus, according to the data of Professor Igor Sundiev, the gap between the incomes of the poor and the rich reached 20.7 [times the "minimal salary" level] in the third quarter of 1995 (in 1990 it had been 4.0). From 1992 through 1994 the official unemployment numbers increased fourfold. However, despite breaking through eight on the decile coefficient scale, which should definitely spell social cataclysm in a marginalized society, this cataclysm is not occurring in Russia. This circumstance strongly indicates that compensatory survival mechanisms have developed, mechanisms which operate outside the system of legitimate societal relations. One such criminal "vent" for these mechanisms is IPN. This fact may be clearly seen in increased numbers of non-

student and non-working narcotics violators who have been brought up on drug-related criminal charges. Between 1985 and the end of 1994 their number grew eight fold.

The

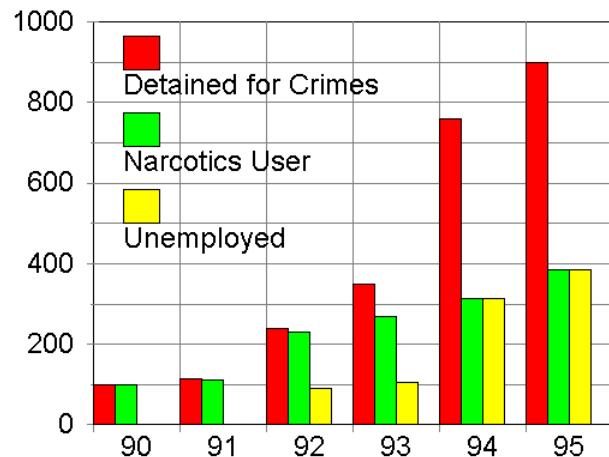


Figure 2 - Growth Rate of the Number of Unemployed and of Other Groups Without Regular Income (%).

above mentioned factors, together with other economic and cultural factors, make up the general trend towards marginalization of the population, one characteristic of which is that people are being drawn into IPN.

Increasing Liberalization of Anti-Drug Laws

The increasing liberalization of anti-drug laws in Russia traces back to 1987, when the concept of so-called insignificant amounts of narcotic substances was introduced into the law. Obtaining and storing narcotic substances within the amounts indicated is not prosecuted as a criminal offense, even when a person is apprehended *flagrante delicto*, and a first-time occurrence is handled as an administrative legal matter.

In 1990, Parliament tried unsuccessfully to legalize drug use. This undertaking did succeed on 5 December 1991, when the Russian Parliament made it legal for all citizens of the Russian Federation, foreigners and non-citizens over 18 to be under the influence of drugs.

As of 1 July 1994, the mandatory drug treatment system for addicts was abolished, and 1 January 1995 saw the removal of existing limitations on ventures involved in the manufacture of medical preparations which contain narcotics. Furthermore, Parliament is taking its time in passing laws which would pertain to the social rehabilitation of drug addicts, the monitoring of legal drug sales or the battle against illegal drug trafficking.

Legal omissions, which are a result of rescinding several morally outdated anti-drug laws

of the Soviet period, are becoming an important factor in the rapid growth of IPN in Russia. This trend was further reinforced by the draft version of the new Criminal Code of the Russian Federation. This state document bans criminal prosecution of persons who are detained for making, acquiring, transporting or storing narcotic substances for non-profit purposes. If this draft version of the Russian Criminal Code is approved by the upper house of our legislative body and by the President of the Russian Federation, then in Russia in 1996 the use of any type of narcotic in any amount could become fully legal, provided that use is "for oneself." This new aspect of the IPN problem in Russia will pave the way for organized crime. For example, it will set the stage for the creation of huge facilities for drug storage and their subsequent transport to destinations both inside the country and beyond its borders. A number of legal issues involved in the regulation of narcotics proliferation also exist in such legal areas as administrative law, marriage and family law, residential real-estate law, finance law, labor law, etc. Liberal undertones running through each of the aforementioned legal codes as they relate to IPN comprise an inter-disciplinary legal trend which is contributing to the negative development of this problem. This trend, like those mentioned earlier and those which will follow, discredits the democratic transformations taking place in Russia, because the population does not view this increase in drug addiction and drug trafficking as a positive aspect of the modern transition of society from the Soviet to the post-Soviet era.

Increase in Ethnic Narco-Crime

The increase in ethnic narco-crime in Russia is closely connected to a number of major factors, the most important of which, in my opinion, is the hasty and not well thought out granting of sovereignty to the Republics of the former Soviet Union. The high degree of demographic tension in these Republics, given their low industrial potential and the mass exodus of the Russian-speaking population skilled in manufacturing technologies, does not help improve the standard of living among the population of the territorially recognized nationality. The cut-back in subsidies from the former capital, Moscow, is also having an effect. In addition, in states with

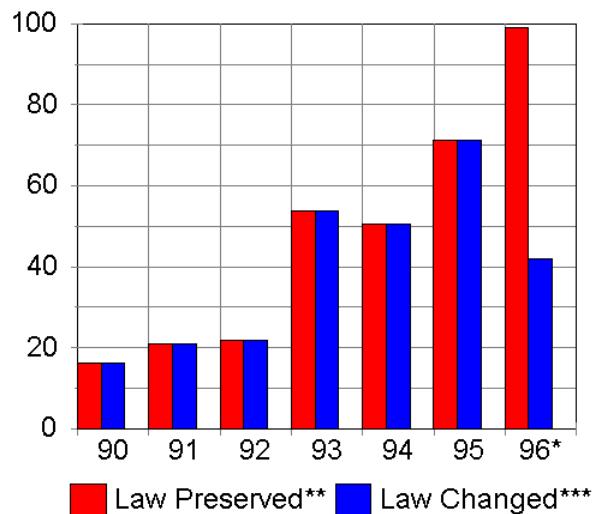


Figure 3 - Historical Dynamics of Illegal Drug Seizures, 1995-96 (est.).

an Islamic orientation there is a level of social and religious ceremonial rites which is materially burdensome on families, e.g., the payment of bridal dowries, the high cost of weddings, circumcision, childbirth, etc. As a result, the inactive population, usually the young people, are forced to seek income on the side, including income from involvement in IPN.

For the reasons listed above, and for a number of others, the amount of criminal activity among the dispersed nationalities on Russian territory has picked up noticeably. These nationality groups are typically migrants who have entered Russia from Georgia, Azerbaijan, Central Asia, Ukraine and other nearby republics.

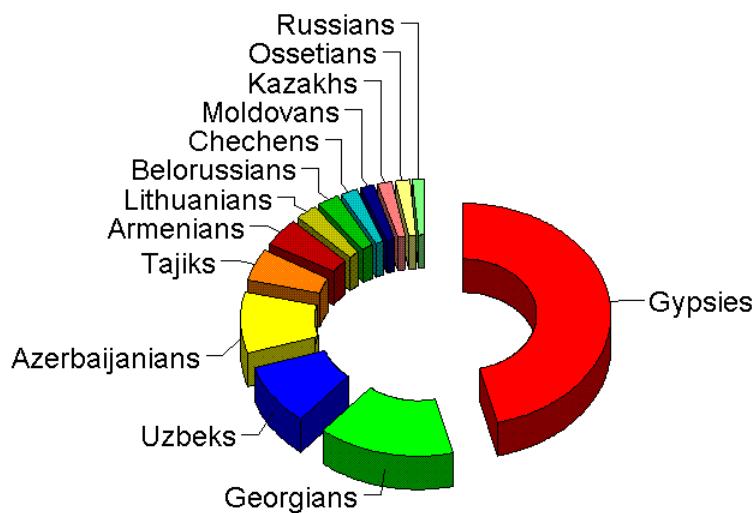


Figure 4 - Ethnic Narco-Crime 1992-95 in the Russian Federation - Selected Data on a Population of 100,000 Ethnic Peoples.

The number of gypsies participating in IPN has risen significantly, with their role being that of intermediaries in illegal narcotics deals.

We are experiencing an influx of narcotics dealers from the Far East, including China, North Korea and the nations of Africa. Nigerian dealers in South American cocaine and heroin have occupied entire blocks of the Moscow suburbs. While in 1994 members of this African nationality were detained for drug dealing on Russian territory in individual cases, in the first half of 1995, in Moscow alone, more than one hundred Nigerians were arrested.

Corruption

Corruption in the sphere of IPN shows a latency level within a range of 0.1% to 1.0 %. That is, for every factual instance of narcotics-related corruption, there are from 100 to 1,000 violations under investigation.

Means/Mode of Corruption	%	Result of Corruptions	%
1. Money	61.0	1. Release of Detainees	52.1
2. Manufactured goods, incl:	25.6	2. Change of Witness Testimony	48.3
Cars	15.4	3. Access to Official Documents	15.8
Cottages	7.7	4. Destruction of Official Documents	12.2
3. Food Items	23.2	5. Withdrawal of Witness	11.0
4. Restaurant Meals/Visits	15.8	6. Alteration of Expert Results	8.5
5. Sex	9.4	7. Discrediting of Officials, Incl:	6.4
6. Advancement at Work	9.4	Health, Court, Prosecutorial	
7. Nepotism	7.7	8. Return of Narcotics to Criminal	5.1
		9. Murder of Hindering Individual	2.4
		10. Other	12.2

Figure 5 - Sociological Research Results of Corruption in the Illegal Proliferation of Narcotics (%) (Sums Do Not Equal 100%)

Studies conducted among more than 90 experts from 18 constituent regions of the Russian Federation revealed a significant level of corruption in the regional administrations, i.e., among judges, lawyers (who act as intermediaries in bribery), the police, customs officials and other categories of government employees.

As it turned out, narcotics, with their enticingly high prices, proved capable of engendering an epidemic of corruption among psychologically and morally "unclean" officials. Based on the estimates from the aforementioned survey, it turns out the government employees were involved in 1.5 million latent, corruption-related crimes, and that every 40th such crime was related to illegal drug proliferation.

Organized narco-crime has not yet played its final role in this process, which presents a danger to Russia's security. Russian criminals, who have close ties with certain officials, politicians, and entrepreneurs, and with support on the side from trans-national organized narco-crime, are increasingly active in penetrating into the political and economic life of the country, attempting through blackmail and threats to take over their own sphere of power. The preliminary results of this criminal pressure are clear: every twelfth government employee fears reprisal from criminals if he or she fails to carry out one of their "requests," requests which the criminals "reinforce" with some type of corrupt action in the beginning.

Narcotics Contraband

Narcotics smuggling in Russia, because of its dynamic nature and intensity, involves all the previously listed trends. This assertion is confirmed in a series of studies conducted by the Russian Ministry of Internal Affairs (MVD), the Security Service, Customs Offices and the Border Service (covering 42 regions of the country).

Russia's "black" market, including, alas, deep in the interior of the country, has been fully prepared by Russian and international organized criminals to handle the increasingly heavy flow of drugs from abroad. The ideology that it is fashionable to use hallucinogens such as LSD, or stimulants such as Ecstasy, has already found its way into the psyche of young people, as has the "not-so-terrible" smoking of marijuana. Thus, the necessary conditions are now in place for creating a narcotics world view among the nation's populace.

European Axis	23.5
Poppy	
Opium	
Hemp	
Morphine	
Cocaine	
Amphetamines	
Tranquilizers	
Hallucinogens	

American Axis	3.8
Cocaine	
Heroine	
Hallucinogens	

African Axis	1.1
Cocaine	
Heroine	
Khat	
Hemp	

Australian Axis	0.1
Opium	
Heroine	

Asian Axis	71.5
Poppy	
Opium	
Morphine	
Heroine	
Hemp	
Amphetamines	
Tranquilizers	

Figure 6 - Percentage of International Sources of Illegal Narcotics Smuggling into Russia.
out of Russia.

Much international propaganda about the lethal narco-threat to the world community is gradually making Russia appear to be a world center of narco-traffic, because supposedly this narco-danger is emanating from Russia. But is this really the case?

According to available data, which are based on a content analysis of information coming from four leading world agencies, between 1993 and July of 1995 the number of Russians involved in drug smuggling made up only 0.7% of the total of all international narcotics criminals. Further, in eight out of ten instances the narcotics shipments involved were into Russia, not

Out of all the narcotics contraband intercepted in Russia, the portion headed out of the country is 4%. Further, according to the results of the above mentioned survey, Asian countries are the source of drugs smuggled into Russia in 7 out of 10 instances.

Drug lords from South America and mafiosi from North America and Western Europe are also counting on making drug profits in Russia. The Africans, too, are managing to grab their piece of the pie. To date, there is only a barely detectable amount of contraband drugs from Australia and Oceania.

Thus, at the present time, narcotics smuggling should be accurately viewed as what it is--an external infringement on Russia's security, which is resulting in damage to the nation's gene pool, money laundering, incursions into politics by trans-national organized crime, and other negative effects.

It should be said that the issue of protecting Russia's interests from internal and external IPN threats has not gone unnoticed by the highest levels of the Russian government. For example, the President's Plan for State Policy to Monitor Narcotics in the Russian Federation was passed on 22 June 93. The Presidential Commission to Counter Drug Abuse and Illegal Drug Trade was created on 5 Jun 94. Further, 3 June 95 saw the approval of the Federal "Program of Integrated Measures to Counter Narcotics Abuse and their Illegal Trade for the Years 1995-1997."

Russia's MVD, State Customs Committee and Federal Security Service have special services and departments devoted to fighting IPN. The Russian Federation Foreign Intelligence Service, the Federal Border Service, and, of late, the Russian Defense Ministry, all devote constant attention to IPN. Within the system of the MVD's illegal drug trade directorate alone the staffing level will very soon reach 10-11,000 militia officers.

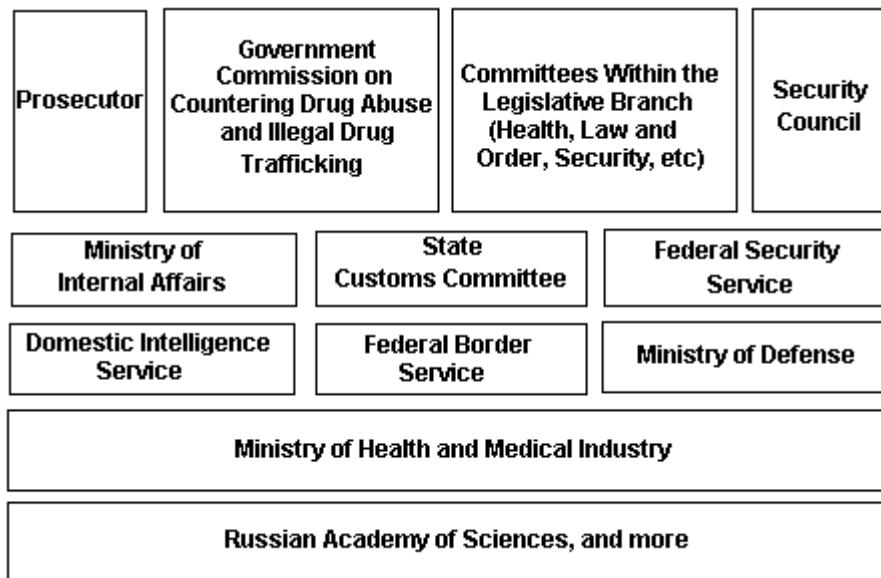


Figure 7 - Leading Russian Government Organizations Engaged in the War on Illegal Narcotics Proliferation

Inter-governmental and inter-agency accords, memoranda and protocols on the joint struggle against IPN have been concluded with more than 50 foreign countries. There are numerous shining examples of productive cooperation in uncovering transnational organized criminal narco-associations. International organizations have rendered assistance to Russia in issues around combating IPN. These organizations include the UN, the HONLEA, governmental organizations of individual countries, such as the US Department of Justice (DEA, FBI), and the Interior Ministries of Austria, France and Italy.³

Nonetheless, no radical breakthrough in the IPN war will be forthcoming until our foreign partners stop seeing Russia as a major source of drug crime on the planet. By the same token, Russia will have to stop seeing the world community as an inexhaustible source of illegal drug contraband. Mutual confrontation on this issue can be avoided if Russia is allowed to integrate unimpeded into the world community. However, this integration seems unlikely unless a strategic model is developed for many aspects of economics, politics and social issues.

One such aspect is collaboration in the transnational struggle against IPN. The cooperation would involve a more stringent system of supra-national scientific, executive, legislative, judicial and prison initiatives. Offered below is one possible model for an international strategy in the fight against IPN, with the model consisting of seven possible elements:

1. To determine the true narco-potential of the constituent members of the world community, conduct an international multi-discipline study of IPN according to a single standard. The UN could serve as executive agent, while in the various regions, such as Europe, the European Council or the Pompidou Group could serve regionally;
2. In order to coordinate international anti-drug activity, there should also be coordination of national strategies, programs and plans for countering IPN, so that these documents do not conflict with one another;
3. Create an international Strategic Intelligence Organization, which would include a Center for Satellite Monitoring of the world's narco-dangerous regions in order to track the production and transport of drugs in those states which in one way or another initiate IPN in the world community;
4. Create an International Rapid Deployment Force for use in the world's narco-dangerous regions where transnational IPN activity exists and which are not meeting their obligations to eliminate this problem;
5. Based on the UN Conventions of 1961, 1971 and 1988, develop, coordinate and ratify an International Legal Code on IPN-related crime;
6. Create under the UN an International Court for trying and sentencing of people engaged in transnational IPN;
7. Create an International Penal System to house people convicted by the International Court.

This idea is not completely new. As far back as 1945, Emery Reves, in his book, *Anatomy of the World*, which was published in New York, deliberating about national security, found it unlikely that international problems would be resolved between individual nations or even by means of military coalitions.⁴

The achievement of world order, including law and order, would be possible only through the creation of supra-national institutions, to which regions would delegate certain rights. In this case, all nations would be compelled to adhere to the established international law, given that they would all be equal before this law. From this point, the common national security would be achieved by introducing a coordinated, established order on the planet, which would be implemented through international institutions endowed with the realistic attributes of legislative, executive and judicial authority.

Subsequently, Emery Reves' concept, in one form or another, was supported and developed by no small number of scientists from various countries of the world, including: L. Brown (1981), F. Kapru (1982), Patricia Mishe (1984), Benjamin Ferents and Ken Case (1988), Eliza Bowlding (1988), M. Barkovsky (1994), Z. Smolen (1995), and several others.⁵

In my opinion, this polemic is also fully applicable for analysis of the problem of establishing stringent monitoring of transnational IPN in the context of the model of international strategy, as set forth above. Naturally, for a whole series of reasons, the model suggested is conceptually problematic in and of itself. However, as it seems to the author, further integration of the world community into a single social organism of great internal diversity will not be possible without a gradual adjustment in planetary thinking and in the law and order which would accompany it.

Otherwise, claims against one another by the countries of the world, as well as mutual accusations of criminal or other dangers, will long remain the reality of the day and the source of many international conflicts. On the whole, the time has now arrived for establishing precedents in creating international systems to counter not only transnational IPN, but also terrorism, arms trade, human trade, local wars, regional wars, and other global problems.

Endnotes

1. Schur, Edwin. *Our Criminal Society: the Social and Legal Sources of Crime in America*, Prentice-Hall (1969).[BACK](#)

2. The chronology of 20th century narcotics addiction and narco-trade in Russia is as follows: First Wave--1914-1937, Second Wave--1957-1969, Third Wave--1983-1997 (est.). -- B.F.K.[BACK](#)

3. Spelled KhONLEA in Russian, this acronym stands for the Heads of National Law-Enforcement Agencies fighting against narcotics. --Trans. [BACK](#)

4. Reves, Emery. *Anatomy of Peace*, Harper (1945).[BACK](#)

5. Because the names listed in this paragraph have been transliterated from the Cyrillic, the actual spelling of the names may be slightly different. --Trans. [BACK](#)